

<b>DEPARTMENTAL REGULATION</b>		<b>Number:</b> 4040-451-03
<b>SUBJECT:</b> Criteria for Time-off Awards	<b>DATE:</b> August 26, 2002	
	<b>OPI:</b> Office of Human Resources Management	

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1 PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for the use of Time-off Awards. The provisions of Section 201 of the Federal Employees Pay Comparability Act of 1990, authorize agencies to grant employees Time-off in recognition of superior accomplishments that contribute to the quality, efficiency or economy of Government operations. This authority is regulated by Title 5 United States Code 4502(e) and Title 5 Code of Federal Regulations 451.104(a). The Time-off Award is an excused absence granted to a Federal employee without charge to leave or loss of pay.

2 SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS/CANCELLATIONS

This regulation replaces Personnel Letter Number 451-12, Time-off as an Incentive Awards, dated June 30, 1992, which is cancelled.

3 ELIGIBILITY

- a All USDA employees who meet the definition of “employee” in 5 U.S.C. 2105, are eligible for Time-off with the exception of:

- (1) Presidential Appointees;
  - (2) Career and non-career Senior Executive Service (SES) employees;
  - (3) Employees in SES equivalent positions, (e.g., Senior Level, Professional and Scientific, Senior Foreign Service, etc.);
  - (4) Employees who do not have a regular, established tour of duty (intermittent);
- b Volunteers and contractors are not eligible for Time-off Awards.

#### 4 CONSIDERATIONS

Scheduling of Time-off is subject to supervisory approval. Before utilizing the Time-off Award, managers should consider the full resource implications of the award, including:

- a Salary of the employee; and
- b Impact on workload and customer service.

#### 5 AWARD AMOUNT

- a A manager or supervisor may grant up to 10 hours of Time-off without a higher level of review or approval. If the award exceeds 10 hours, it must be reviewed and approved by an agency official at a higher level than the recommending official. In addition, a written justification must be attached to the AD-287-2 (dated 7/94), Recommendation & Approval of Awards for Time-off Awards exceeding 10 hours.
- b Full-time employees may not be granted more than 40 hours for a single achievement. Full-time employees may be granted up to 80 hours of Time-off during a leave year.
- c Part-time employees or those with an uncommon tour of duty may be granted Time-off up to the average number of work hours in the employee's biweekly scheduled tour of duty during a leave year. The limit for any single contribution for part-time employees or employees with an uncommon tour of duty is one half the maximum that may be granted during the leave year.  
(For example: If an employee's scheduled tour of duty is 64 hours biweekly, the employee may be granted up to 64 hours of Time-off during the leave year, and cannot exceed 32 hours for a single achievement).
- d The amount of Time-off granted must be proportionate to the value of the contribution being

recognized. Refer to the AD-1097 *Guide for Employee Recognition* when determining the amount of Time-off to grant an employee. The guide is available on the Office of Human Resources Management website at [http://www.usda.gov/da/employ/recognition\\_program.htm](http://www.usda.gov/da/employ/recognition_program.htm) or through your servicing personnel office.

- e Time-off Awards may be granted along with other forms of awards, as long as the total value of the awards given reflects the value of the contribution being recognized. For example, an employee might receive both a one-day Time-off Award and a \$50 cash award as an incentive award for a single contribution, as long as the combination of the awards is suitable recognition for the value of the employee's contribution in accordance with the *Guide for Employee Recognition*.

## 6 EXAMPLES OF ELIGIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS

Time-off Awards are intended to recognize the following types of accomplishments or contributions:

- a Making a high quality contribution involving a difficult or important project assignment.
- b Displaying initiative and skill in completing an assignment or project before the deadline.
- c Using initiative and creativity in making improvement in projects, activities, programs or services.
- d Ensuring the mission of the work unit is accomplished during a difficult period by successfully completing additional work or a project assignment while maintaining the employee's own workload.

## 7 USE OF TIME-OFF

- a Time-off Awards must be scheduled and used within 26 pay periods from the effective date of processing. After the 26<sup>th</sup> pay period, any unused Time-off will be automatically forfeited and may not be restored or otherwise substituted.
- b A Time-off Award may only be taken after it has been entered in the payroll/personnel system and is available in the National Finance Center database.
- c If an employee is incapacitated while using his or her Time-off Award, that period may be recorded as sick leave, and the Time-off rescheduled for another time, within the 26 pay period limitation.
- d Any unused Time-off will be forfeited once an employee separates or transfers to another

USDA or Federal agency. If forfeited, no other award or compensation may be substituted. Please see 8c for instructions to delete forfeited Time-off.

## 8 PROCESSING

- a The Time-off Award must be recommended and approved on Form AD-287-2, "Recommendation & Approval of Awards." See 5a, page 2 for additional approval information.
- b When recognizing a group you may either:
  - (1) Prepare an individual AD-287-2 for each member of the group; or
  - (2) Prepare one AD-287-2 with a list indicating the required information for each group member.
- c The processing clerk will enter information on Time-off awards or forfeited Time-off (see 7d) into the National Finance Center database. Detailed instructions on processing the actions and record keeping are presented in Personnel/Payroll Processing note issuances.
- d Once processed, a copy of the AD-287-2 should be forwarded immediately to the time keeper who will document the Time-off Award on the Time and Attendance report (recorded via prefix/transaction code 61/66) and then attach a copy of the Form 287-2 to the Certified Time and Attendance report as supporting documentation.

## 9 RESTRICTIONS

- a Under no circumstance does Time-off convert to cash (5 CFR 451.104(f)) nor transfer from one USDA or Federal agency.
- b Recommending officials may not grant Time-off Awards to employees from other USDA agencies.
- c The Department does not support or encourage managers to grant Time-off to an entire division, region, or other large geographic area and allow all employees the same day off. This gives the appearance of granting an official holiday (official holidays are created by law). Agencies are encouraged to use sound judgment when issuing all awards. The misuse of the awards authority could seriously compromise the integrity of the program. All awards should be granted with careful consideration of excellence in service.

## 10 ADVANTAGES OF GRANTING TIME-OFF

- a Equity. Identical Time-off Awards granted to members of a team with various grade levels may be perceived as more equitable than cash awards that are based on a percentage of pay.
- b Value. Employees with low annual/sick leave balances may especially value Time-off Awards.
- c Timeliness. Time-off Awards should be closely linked to the time of the accomplishment.

## 11 DISADVANTAGES OF GRANTING TIME-OFF

- a Excess Leave. Employees who have “use or lose” annual leave might not value a Time-off Award.
- b Hidden Costs. Because the form of the award is Time-off, not cash, managers may not see the hidden costs associated with the award.
- c Loss of Productivity. Productivity could be compromised because staff is away from the office using their Time-off Awards.

## 12 PROGRAM MONITORING

Agencies are responsible for monitoring and assessing the usage of Time-off Awards. This documented information will be reported to the Office of Personnel Management as part of their Annual Incentive Awards Report.

## 13 REPORTS

Each mission area/agency will provide information and reports to the Office of Human Resources Management concerning the operation of its program(s) as requested.

-END-